

# Black Licorice: Trick or Treat?

## Black Licorice: Trick or Treat



Español (</consumers/articulos-en-espanol/dulces-de-regaliz-un-gusto-o-un-susto>)

As it turns out, you really can overdose on candy—or, more precisely, black licorice.

Days before the biggest candy eating holiday of the year, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) encourages moderation if you enjoy snacking on the old fashioned favorite.

So, if you're getting your stash ready for Halloween, here's some advice from FDA:

If you're 40 or older, eating 2 ounces of black licorice a day for at least two weeks could land you in the hospital with an irregular heart rhythm or arrhythmia.

FDA experts say black licorice contains the compound glycyrrhizin, which is the sweetening compound derived from licorice root. Glycyrrhizin can cause potassium levels in the body to fall. When that happens, some people experience abnormal heart rhythms, as well as high blood pressure, edema (swelling), lethargy, and congestive heart failure.

FDA's Linda Katz, M.D., M.P.H., in 2016, reported that the agency received a report of a black licorice aficionado who had a problem after eating the candy. And several medical journals have linked black licorice to health problems in people over 40, some of whom had a history of heart disease and/or high blood pressure.

Katz says potassium levels are usually restored with no permanent health problems when consumption of black licorice stops.

Licorice, or liquorice, is a low-growing shrub mostly grown for commercial use in Greece, Turkey, and Asia. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) says the plant's root has a long history of use as a folk or traditional remedy in both Eastern and Western medicine. It has been used as a treatment for heartburn, stomach ulcers, bronchitis, sore throat, cough and some infections caused by viruses, such as hepatitis; however, NIH says there are insufficient data available to determine if licorice is effective in treating any medical condition.

Licorice is also used as a flavoring in food. Many "licorice" or "licorice flavor" products manufactured in the United States do not contain any licorice. Instead, they contain anise oil, which has the same smell and taste. Licorice root that is sold as a dietary supplement can be found with the glycyrrhizin removed, resulting in a product known as deglycyrrhizinated licorice (<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/licoriceroot/>), or DGL, NIH says.

If you have a fondness for black licorice, FDA is offering this advice:

- No matter what your age, don't eat large amounts of black licorice at one time.
- If you have been eating a lot of black licorice and have an irregular heart rhythm or muscle weakness, stop eating it immediately and contact your healthcare provider.
- Black licorice can interact with some medications, herbs and dietary supplements. Consult a health care professional if you have questions about possible interactions with a drug or supplement you take.

If you've experienced any problems after eating licorice, contact the FDA [consumer complaint coordinator \(/consumer-complaint-coordinators\)](#) in your area.

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## Hershey's responds to FDA's warning over eating too much black licorice

By [Jade Scipioni](#) | FOXBusiness

Hershey's (NYSE:HSY), the maker of the top selling licorice brand, Twizzlers, has responded to the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) warning that eating too much black licorice could land you in the hospital.

"As with any treat or candy, we recommend you enjoy licorice in moderation and as part of an overall balanced diet," Jeff Beckman, a spokesperson for Hershey's, told FOX Business.

The response comes after the FDA released a warning earlier this week saying that consumers 40 years or older should take it easy on the old fashioned treat as it could cause heart complications.

"If you're 40 or older, eating two ounces of black licorice a day for at least two weeks could land you in the hospital with an irregular heart rhythm or arrhythmia," the FDA said.

And it's not just adults – the FDA says it doesn't recommend any age group eat large amounts of "black licorice at one time."

The problem, experts say, is that the classic candy contains glycyrrhizin, a sweetening compound derived from licorice root, which can cause potassium levels in the body to fall.

"When that happens, some people experience abnormal heart rhythms, as well as high blood pressure, edema (swelling), lethargy and congestive heart failure," the agency added.

Hershey's added that a majority of its Twizzlers sales don't come from black licorice but rather its iconic red licorice line, including its strawberry and cherry-flavored products, which doesn't contain any glycyrrhizin.

"We do sell a very small amount traditional Twizzlers Black Licorice that is made with licorice extract (licorice root extract). This extract is what provides the characteristic licorice flavor. Glycyrrhizin is a substance which occurs naturally in the licorice plant and in licorice extract. Twizzlers Black Licorice contains a very small amount of licorice extract and the glycyrrhizin levels are well below the U.S. FDA's limits (3.1% glycyrrhizin in soft candy). Any Twizzlers Black Licorice products that contain licorice extract lists this ingredient on the package," Beckman said.

Other licorice brands like Red Vines and Good & Plenty did not immediately respond to FOX Business' request for a comment regarding the FDA's warning.

The FDA said it decided to release a warning after it received a report of a black licorice aficionado who experienced health problems after eating the candy on a consistent basis. Yet, one expert noted in the report that the good news is that potassium levels are usually restored with no permanent health problems when consumption of the chewy treat stops.

However, any consumer who is on prescription medications, certain herbs and dietary supplements should consult with a health care professional before consuming the treat as it could possibly interfere with their treatment.

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